

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 27, 2005

EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH MUST MOVE FORWARD, UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF N.I.H.

Join us as an Original Cosponsor of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act

Dear Colleague:

We'd like to bring to your attention the following editorial, which appeared in *USA Today* on January 26, 2005. As reasons multiply for why the current federal embryonic stem cell policy isn't working, momentum to expand the policy continues to build.

Today's debate: Stem cell research

Stem cell policy collapses

Our view:

Contamination of cell colonies destroys basis for Bush's compromise.

Once President Bush makes a decision, he doesn't like to look back.

But the time has come for Bush to revisit the policy he set in 2001 on stem cell research. The basis for it has disappeared.

Embryonic stem cells are the smallest component of life, tinier than the head of a pin. They hold the promise of one day regenerating damaged organs and treating diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and diabetes. But research on them is controversial because to extract the cells, scientists must destroy the days-old human embryo.

Creating embryos only to harvest their stem cells is a moral anathema to Bush, who told an anti-abortion rally in Washington on Monday that he's dedicated to promoting a "culture of life."

For that reason, he limited federal research funding to 60 stem cell colonies, or "lines," in existence when he announced his policy 3½ years ago. Only 22 such lines are now available, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and federal funds cannot be used to study lines that might be developed privately or by states.

Researchers have long worried that the government's lines are tainted by animal products, such as mouse and calf cells, used to help them grow in the laboratory. A study published Sunday in *Nature Medicine* confirmed that the lines are compromised and may be useless or even dangerous in treating disease in humans.

In light of the new study and other developments since 2001, Bush should ease the

restrictions. The United States is in danger of falling behind other nations more willing to invest in the future, or at least not stand in its way. America's best scientists and institutions often depend on federal funding and are hamstrung by the lack of usable cell lines.

Private groups, universities and states aren't bound by the federal restrictions and are picking up the slack. In November, California voters overwhelmingly approved spending \$3 billion during the next 10 years to fund stem cell research. (In contrast, the NIH spent only \$25 million last year.) New Jersey, Wisconsin and Illinois are also budgeting tax dollars to promote the work. The Harvard Stem Cell Institute opened last April with 17 new lines. Researchers will have free access to them — unless they also accept federal funding.

These actions mean vital research can continue, but not as vigorously as it could with full federal participation.

The moral objections raised by Bush are serious. But the ethical dilemma of having to create embryos for the sole purpose of destroying them needn't be insurmountable. More than 400,000 embryos developed at fertility clinics are now frozen and will likely be discarded. Federally funded scientists could work with them if the policy were changed. That's the course 264 members of Congress, including prominent opponents of abortion, urged Bush to take last spring.

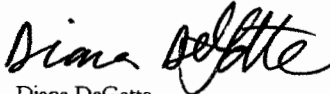
No one is predicting imminent cures based on stem cell research. Indeed, the research didn't even start until 1998. But it's impossible to predict when a breakthrough could occur. The federal government shouldn't impede America's scientists from searching for cures. Blocking medical progress doesn't promote the "culture of life" Bush endorses.

We will soon be reintroducing the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act to enable the National Institutes of Health to fund research on more pristine, higher quality stem cell lines. Please join us. Contact Elizabeth Wenk with Representative Castle (5-4165) or Meghan Taira with Representative DeGette (5-4431) for more information.

Sincerely,



Michael N. Castle
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Diana DeGette
MEMBER OF CONGRESS